

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**"This Will Not Stand"
The Decision to fight Saddam**

**NANCY L. HOFFER / CLASS OF 2000
COURSE 5603
SEMINAR K**

**FACULTY SEMINAR LEADER:
Dr. James Lucas**

**FACULTY ADVISOR:
Mr. Bruce Gregory**

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2000		2. REPORT TYPE N/A		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE "This Will Not Stand" The Decision to Fight Saddam				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University National War College Washington, DC				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 22	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

"This Will Not Stand" The Decision to fight Saddam

*After [Bob Woodward's book, The Commanders] came out, there was a lot of talk about Powell the "reluctant warrior." Guilty. War is a deadly game; and I do not believe in spending the lives of Americans lightly. My responsibility that day was to lay out all the options for the nation's civilian leadership. However in our democracy it is the President, not generals, who make decisions about going to war. I had done my duty. The sanctions clock was ticking down. If the President was right, if he decided that it must be war, then my job was to make sure we were ready to go in and win."*¹

Colin Powell

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¹ Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (NY: Random House, 1995) 480.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report examines the historical events, along with actions and decisions of key players in the U.S. government that led to American involvement in the Persian Gulf War. It uses a modified version of A Practitioner's Framework for Decision Making² to discuss the roles played by the key participants in the national security decisions during the time period leading up to the beginning of the war. The American Government goes to war reluctantly and only after a comprehensive consideration of the consequences. The decision to fight was a logical result of an institutionalized process that involved the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. Government.

Setting the Stage – A Synopsis of Events leading up to the Invasion of Kuwait. In the middle of July 1990 the Defense Intelligence Agency began to collect satellite photos that showed Iraqi Republican Guard Forces massing north of Kuwait. The initial assessments from the intelligence community indicated that the troops were being deployed as a threatening lever in negotiations over oil fields on the border between the two countries.

On July 25th, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie was called into a meeting with Iraqi president Saddam Hussein with only one hour's notice. This meeting has been the subject of much controversy and debate. Saddam may have interpreted her statements as a "green light" to go ahead with the invasion. Glaspie indicated that America had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait" and that the U.S. would insist on a

² National War College, *The National Security Process*, Course 5603 Syllabus, Block B (Washington, DC, 1999), 7.

nonviolent settlement.³ However, Ambassador Glaspie left the meeting with an assurance from Saddam that he would engage in talks with the Kuwaitis. Her cable back to Washington indicated that negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait were possible.

2. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Nature and extent of the issue. Iraq surprised the world by invading Kuwait on 2 August. The Kuwaiti Army was no match for the invading forces and hundreds of Kuwaiti citizens and soldiers were killed or taken prisoner.⁴ As further events unfolded there was mounting concern that Iraq would also attempt to invade and occupy Saudi Arabia.

Degree of threat or opportunity. Iraq and Kuwait each hold ten percent of the world's oil reserves. With the invasion, Iraq had control of twenty percent, enough to manipulate world oil prices. Saddam would control forty percent if he were to also take over Saudi Arabia. Higher oil prices could have led to higher inflation and harm the U.S. and World's economy.

It must be noted that not all economic analysts agreed with this conclusion. David Henderson, who had been the energy economist on former President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisors, published an argument saying that although the short-term demand for oil is fairly inelastic, the longer term economic consequences of Saddam controlling ***all*** of the oil in the Middle

³ April Glaspie, from an Iraqi translation of the meeting from a tape recording, that agrees with Ambassador Glaspie's own report to the State Department, found in Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 212.

East would not drive up the price per barrel by a significant amount. He calculated that the costs of war would be higher. His bottom line conclusion was: "Whatever other justification there may be for war with Saddam, cheap oil isn't one of them."⁵

Aside from the economic threat, there was a very real concern for what would happen if Saddam turned Iraq into an Arab superpower capable of disturbing the World's balance of power. Iraq had the fourth-largest army in the world. There was a very real concern that Iraq was positioned to easily take Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.

Existing Policy. It had been U.S. policy to support Iraq in their war against Iran. The U.S. had promoted normal trade with Iraq. Iraq was a top buyer of American corn and wheat and the biggest foreign consumer of American rice. U.S. farm and industry lobbies successfully defeated a bill to institute sanctions after Iraq used poison gas to kill thousands of Kurdish civilians in 1988. The Bush administration also continued the pro-Iraqi stance, and in January 1990 declared that expanded trade with Iraq was in the U.S. national interest.⁶

There was an abrupt turn around in the U.S. policy towards Iraq with the invasion of Kuwait. The revised policy was based on the U. S. vital interests previously laid out by Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Jimmy Carter. Roosevelt stated: "The defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the

⁴ Department of State, Bureau of Political Military Affairs, *Chronology of Events Leading to the U.S.-led Attack on Iraq*, released January 8, 1999; available from <http://www.pbs.org.wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/cron/>

⁵ David Henderson, "Sorry Saddam, Oil Embargoes Don't Hurt U.S.", *The Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 1990, A10.

⁶ Otto Friedrich, ed., *Desert Storm the War in the Persian Gulf*, (Boston: Time Warner Publishing, distributed by Little, Brown and Company, 1991) 16-17.

United States.”⁷ In his 1980 State of the Union Address, Carter had publicly articulated U.S. policy as follows:

“An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America. And such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”⁸

Desired Resolution. The desired resolution was articulated in a public statement delivered by President Bush immediately following the invasion that strongly condemned Iraq and called for “the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces”.⁹ The list of objectives was later expanded to include the restoration of Kuwait’s government, security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and the protection of U.S. citizens abroad.¹⁰

3. CONTROLLING AUTHORITIES

Moral imperatives. More than 3,000 Americans and over 15,000 other foreigners were being held in Kuwait and Iraq. They were being placed at key military installations to act as human shields against coalition bombing attacks. Amnesty International reports documented Iraqi atrocities in Kuwait that included hundreds of cases of murder and many different types of torture.

Ethical considerations. President Bush drew a parallel between Saddam’s behavior and that of Adolf Hitler. Bush drew on Winston Churchill’s belief that if Hitler had been stopped in 1936, World War II might have been avoided.

President Bush also felt that covert actions to destabilize Saddam’s

⁷ Bruce W. Watson and Bruce W. Watson, Jr., “The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait,” in *Military Lessons of the Gulf War*, ed. Bruce W. Watson, (London: Greenhill Books, 1993), 17.

⁸ Jimmy Carter, quoted in Woodward, *The Commanders*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 230.

⁹ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 223.

regime and remove him from office were warranted by the gravity of the situation and the threat to U.S. national interests.

The Constitution. The legislative and executive branches of government share responsibility in making a decision to go to war. The U.S. Constitution gives the Congress both the power of the purse and the authority to declare war. The President is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Legal Authority. The War Powers Resolution passed by Congress in 1973 requires the president to consult with Congress “in every possible instance” involving the use of American troops in either hostile or potentially hostile situations. The resolution requires the president to report to congress within 24 hours of committing troops. The troops cannot engage in military action for more than sixty days unless Congress declares war, or authorizes the use of force, or extends the sixty-day period, or cannot meet due to an attack on the U.S.

President Bush made it clear that he felt he did not need the approval of Congress to send troops to the Persian Gulf. However, he did ask for and eventually received congressional authorization.¹¹ The House approved a resolution that specifically authorized “use of military force” by 250 to 183. The Senate only approved the measure with 52 to 47 votes.¹² Throughout the process President Bush consulted regularly with his legal counsel, Boyden Gray, to assure that he was on secure legal footing.

Policies, Precedent and Convention. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War,

¹⁰ Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final report to Congress* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, April 1992) 22.

¹¹ George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 481.

former Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger delivered a speech at the National Press Club, in 1984 that laid out the criteria for use of U.S. forces abroad, as follows:

- (1) "The United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interests";
- (2) the commitment should be made "with the clear intention of winning";
- (3) the engagement should be carried out with "clearly defined political and military objectives";
- (4) it "must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary";
- (5) it should "have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress"; and
- (6) it should "be a last resort".¹³

Public Support. One of the major lessons learned from the Vietnam experience was how damaging an unpopular war could be to the American psychology. The administration also knew that public support could only be maintained if the information provided through the media was clear and creditable.

4. DECISION-MAKERS

The major participants are listed in the appendix. The list includes participants from the three branches of the U.S. government and other nations.

Executive Branch.

Inter-agency system - The National Security Council (NSC). The role of the NSC is to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the president.¹⁴

¹² Woodward, 362.

¹³ Casper Weinberger, quoted in Woodward, 117.

¹⁴ National Security Act of 1947, section 101. [50 U.S.C. 402] (b).

The Council is an advisory, not a collective decision-making body.¹⁵ The four statutory members of the NSC are the president, vice president, secretary of state and the secretary of defense. The national security advisor, director of Central Intelligence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also attend meetings as statutory advisors. The NSC met immediately after the invasion to discuss options.

The President - President George Bush personally took a leading role in the decision making process.

Vice President – It is easy to overlook the role of the vice President, however Dan Quayle was included as a member of the NSC.

Secretary of State – James Baker took the lead in initiating diplomatic activities to resolve the situation.

Secretary of Defense – Richard Cheney took a strong leadership role in marshalling the resources of the Department of Defense.

National Security Advisor – The National Security Advisor is the manager of the National Security Council. The role of Brent Scowcroft was to be an honest broker who would effectively present the views of the various cabinet officers to the president.¹⁶

Chairman JCS – The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act made the Chairman the principal military advisor to the President, the Secretary of the Defense and the NCS. Colin Powell's job was to give the range of military advice and opinion for

¹⁵ Lincoln P. Bloomfield, "The National Security Process," John Norton Moore, Frederick S. Tipson and Robert F. Turner, eds., in *National Security Law*, (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1990) 898.

a situation.

Agency heads – The Defense Intelligence Agency has the responsibility to provide intelligence summaries to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. DIA provided the first intelligence about the massing of Iraqi troops along the Kuwaiti border. The Secretary of the Treasury provided advice on the potential economic consequences of the invasion. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) planned and conducted covert actions to destabilize Saddam's regime.

Legislative Branch. The legislature exercises congressional oversight.

The Senate. Sam Nunn, Georgia Democrat, Chairman Senate Armed Services Committee, conducted public hearings to consider if the U.S. was rushing precipitously to war. Nunn supported the initial deployment of forces, but criticized the decision to create an offensive military capability. His conclusion was that the U.S. should wait for sanctions to work and he questioned if liberation of Kuwait was a vital U.S. interest.¹⁷

The House. Les Aspin, Wisconsin Democrat, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, conducted his own hearings on Gulf policy. He analyzed the advantages and risks of military action and concluded that he could support a war.¹⁸

Judicial Branch

Normally the judiciary would not be part of this decision process, but they did

¹⁶ George Bush in George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998) 18.

¹⁷ Woodward, 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., 345.

get involved in the dispute between Congress and the Administration concerning the authority of the President to begin offensive military action.

5. ACTIONS TAKEN

Executive Actions. There were a number of actions undertaken by the executive branch as the events leading to war unfolded. The first was President Bush's public statement demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait, issued immediately following the invasion. Bush also signed an emergency executive order to freeze Iraqi assets in the US and prohibit any financial transactions with Iraq. A second order froze Kuwaiti assets to prevent Iraq from being able to get at them. These orders were based on plans drawn up by National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, legal council representatives and officials from the Treasury Department.

On the day following the invasion, the National Security Council met to plan a massive diplomatic effort to provide additional pressures and organize world opinion against Iraq. Military and economic options were also discussed. In the following days, President Bush ordered the CIA to begin planning covert action to remove Saddam from power. He authorized covert CIA operations to overthrow Saddam a few weeks later.

The military went to work immediately to develop plans for the protection of Saudi Arabia. President Bush gave his approval to Cheney to begin moving forces as soon as King Fahd approved the deployment.

Congressional Actions. The individual members of Congress naturally

represent different interest. Up until the day of the invasion, Senator Dole had a legislative hold on a sanctions bill. However as events evolved the commitment of congress gradually began to coalesce.

One example of congressional commitment was when Japan balked at providing financial assistance to the effort. The House of Representatives passed a bill that would have pulled America's 50,000 troops out of Japan. The ploy worked and Japan ended up contributing \$9 billion to the effort.¹⁹

President Bush asked congress for a resolution supporting the use of all necessary means to implement the U.N. resolutions one week prior to the January 15 deadline. On January 12th, both houses of Congress voted to support the President if he should use force.

6. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROCESS

Politics. One of the first things that President Bush had to consider was the negative consequence of higher oil prices and the resulting inflation that would follow. As leader of the country, he would be held responsible for any detrimental effects on the American economy.

Court Decision. The U.S. Judicial System became involved when members of Congress brought suit against President Bush for his contemplated use of military force against Iraq on constitutional grounds. Although Federal District Judge Harold Green ruled that the issue was not ready for judicial determination, he also questioned the legality of a presidential power to wage a war by calling it

¹⁹ Friedrich, 30.

something else.²⁰

Public Opinion (domestic and international). Up until Election Day, President Bush sent out a series of mixed messages that confused both the American public and the rest of the world. Some of the ambiguity was due to the paradox that the best way for President Bush to avoid war was to credibly demonstrate that he was prepared to wage one.

He also faced the difficulty of addressing different audiences in the U.S., with the Arab and European coalition members and of course Saddam himself. Some American civilians were concerned that the US military was overly enthusiastic about getting into the conflict. Many were apprehensive about the possibility of major U.S. casualties. Most Americans were confused about the purpose of going to war. Was it to resist aggression or to ensure a supply of cheap oil?

After the U.N. Security Council passed resolution 678, authorizing the use of force if Saddam did not withdraw his forces by 15 January, President Bush offered to “go the extra mile for peace.” He invited Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to Washington and offered to send Baker to Baghdad to talk to Saddam. The offer served the dual purpose of attempting a diplomatic solution and to assuage domestic concerns. A poll published by the Washington Post showed that 90 percent of Americans approved of the Baker-to-Baghdad offer.²¹ On December 6, Iraq announced the release of all western hostages and agreed in principle to attend the talks. However, Iraq and the U.S. were never

²⁰ Louis Fisher and David Gravy Adler, “The War Powers Resolution: Time to Say Goodbye,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 113, Number 1, (1998) 13-14.

able to agree on a date for the proposed talks and they never occurred.

Other Nations and Actors.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC). As soon as the invasion occurred, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering immediately began working with the UNSC. Resolution 660, condemning the invasion and demanding the Iraq withdraw their forces from Kuwait was passed on August 2.²² On August 6, the Security Council voted in favor of a trade embargo. They passed a total of 12 anti-Iraq resolutions. The final one was Resolution 678, approving use of all necessary means to drive Iraq from Kuwait after January 15, 1991. Eventually, 36 countries provided military support to the Coalition against Iraq. Other countries provided equipment or economic assistance.²³ The roles of some of the major countries involved are described below.

England. The invasion occurred just prior to a previously scheduled meeting between George Bush and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Aspen, Colorado. Private discussions between the two world leaders helped Bush “solidify views that had formed but not hardened.”²⁴ England was the first foreign nation to support the American stance against Iraq.

Russia. U.S. administration officials felt that Soviet backing was crucial to building the coalition. President Mikhail Gorbachev initially opposed the possibility of military force. However, by September in a meeting with Bush in

²¹ Woodward, 337.

²² David Nowlin, Ronald Stupak, *War as an Instrument of Policy; Past, Present and Future*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998) 103.

²³ Ibid., 106.

²⁴ An unnamed senior official directly involved in the effort to devise a strategy as quoted by Lally Weymouth, “How Bush Went to War”, *Washington Post* (March 31, 1991): B1, B4.

Helsinki, he supported U.S. demands that Iraq pull out of Kuwait unconditionally.²⁵ Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze worked together to craft the wording of U.N Resolution 678 and eventually agreed on the phrase “all necessary means.”²⁶

Iraq. Iraq’s motives were difficult to understand for the same reasons that the U.S. intelligence community was unable to predict the invasion. Saddam left the rest of the world guessing what his next move would be. President Bush and his NSC were hoping that Saddam would want to avoid war with the U.S.

The Arab League. In the days leading up to and following the invasion of Kuwait, the leaders of the Arab world sent a consistent message that this was an Arab problem that they could resolve without the intervention of the U.S. Prior to the invasion they all believed that Iraq’s massing of forces was a negotiating ploy to intimidate Kuwait in the resolution of several economic issues. Even after the invasion they wanted to try to resolve the problem themselves. There was concern that escalation on the part of the American military could provoke Iraq to attack Saudi Arabia. Only two-thirds of the members of the Arab League agreed to a statement denouncing the invasion.

The U.S. realized that they could not fight Iraq without the support of the Arab nations, and the State Department led the effort to build support using the instruments of statecraft.

Saudi Arabia. King Fahd initially turned down US offers of assistance, but with prodding from his nephew Prince Bandar he met with Dick Cheney on August 6th,

²⁵ Friedrich, 30.

²⁶ Woodward, 334.

for a detailed briefing on the situation. It was only after he saw the highly classified satellite photographs of the Iraqi troops with his own eyes that King Fahd eventually agreed to allow U.S. forces on Saudi soil.

Egypt. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak was outraged by the invasion of Kuwait, in light of the fact that Saddam had given him a personal assurance that this would not occur. Egypt was receiving \$2.3 billion a year in U.S. economic and military assistance. Mubarak joined the multinational force and permitted the use of Egyptian air space and the Suez Canal. He was rewarded with a promise from the Bush administration to cancel a \$6.7 billion military debt.²⁷

Other Arab Countries. Other Arab countries including Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates soon joined the coalition. Morocco agreed to commit troops. Syria resisted at first but was eventually persuaded to join and was rewarded for its cooperation with \$2 to \$3 billion from the Gulf Oil States.

Turkey. President Turgut Ozal agreed to enforce the U.N. sanctions and to allow NATO to use the Incirlik air base. The Emir of Kuwait promised to compensate Turkey for financial damages suffered through enforcement of the sanctions.²⁸

Israel. The primary concern was to keep Israel out of the war. It was Cheney's responsibility to keep Israel informed of the unfolding events.

²⁷ Friedrich, 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 27.

The Media. It is interesting to note that when a group of five U.S. Senators went to visit Saddam in Iraq less than four months before the invasion of Kuwait, Wyoming Republican Alan Simpson essentially agreed with Saddam's criticisms of the Western press.²⁹ The relationship between members of the U.S. Government and the media can be adversarial at times. However, the media had several important roles in the process.

The most important was to provide information to the public about the unfolding events. They were there to promulgate President Bush's statement: "This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait." A flow of information was necessary to prepare the public for first the possibility of and then the advent of war. Of course this need for information had to be balanced against the need for operational security to protect American troops.

The media role in providing multiple fora for public discussion and debate about the merits and consequences of potential war was equally important. We must remember that there was much uncertainty about Iraq's capability and Saddam's intent. No one could assure that the war would be as casualty free for the coalition side as it turned out to be. Americans had many different interests and points of view. The airing of divergent opinions in the media about what America should do was a useful feedback mechanism to the decision-makers. Finally, the media was there to chronicle the mood of the country and the events that took place for history.

²⁹ Paul A. Gigot, "A Great American Screw-Up," *National Interest* 22 (Winter 1990/91) 3-10.

7. CONCLUSION

“National security strategy and policy are formulated and implemented within international and domestic political processes and environments that are dynamic, changing and replete with competing interests. As a consequence, policy is often as much an outcome of bureaucratic processes, compromise, and the influence of a dominant personality as it is of ‘rational’ calculus.”³⁰

In his book *The Commanders*, Bob Woodward wrote about the U.S. military decision making process in the period leading up to January 16, 1991 when the war began. He describes decision making at the highest levels of national government as a complex human interaction. He wrote:

“The decision to go to war is one that defines a nation, both to the world and, perhaps more importantly, to itself. There is no more serious business for a national government, no more accurate measure of national leadership.”³¹

There were several turning points along the way where different decisions by some of the key players in either the U.S. or foreign governments could have influenced the process to achieve a different outcome. All of the participants and decision-makers had different roles to play and had their individual opinions on the best course of action. Although President Bush played the guiding leadership role, the end result was not simply the will of one man, but was a consensus between the executive and legislative branches of government. The final U.S. decision to go to war was a well thought out resolution arrived at through a complex process of checks and balances that is a unique feature of the American form of government.

³⁰ National War College, “Integrating Themes”, *Student Handbook 1999-2000*, 8.

³¹ Woodward, 34.

Appendix – List of Key Players

	NAME	TITLE
Executive Branch	George Bush	President
	Dan Quayle	Vice-President
	John Sununu	White House Chief of Staff
	Marlin Fitzwater	President's Press Secretary
	C. Boyden Gray	White House Legal Council
	James A. Baker III	Secretary of State
	John Kelly	Ass. Secretary of State for Near East and South East Affairs
	April Glaspie	U.S. Ambassador to Iraq
	William H. Webster	Director CIA
	Richard Kerr	Deputy Director CIA
	Harry E. Soyster	Director DIA
	Brent Scowcroft	National Security Advisor
	Robert Gates	Deputy National Security Advisor
	Richard Haass	NSC Middle East Expert
	Dick Cheney	Secretary of Defense
	Colin Powell	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
	Norman Schwarzkoph	Commander, U.S. Central Command
	Nicholas F. Brady	Secretary of the Treasury
Legislative Branch	Sam Nunn (D-GA)	Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee
	Les Aspin	Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
	Lee Hamilton	Chairman, House Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East
Judicial Branch	Harold H. Green	Federal District Judge
Others – U.S.	Thomas Pickering	U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.

	NAME	TITLE
Foreign Actors	Saddam Hussein	Iraqi President
	Tariq Aziz	Iraqi Foreign Minister
	Mohammad al-Mashat	Iraqi ambassador to US
	Prince Bandar bin Sultan	Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States
	King Fahd	King Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina
	Sheik Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah	Emir of Kuwait
	Sheik Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah	Crown Prince of Kuwait
	Hosni Mubarak	President of Egypt
	King Hussein	King of Jordan
	Hafez Assad	President of Syria
	Turgut Ozal	President of Turkey
	Margaret Thatcher	British Prime Minister
	Mikhail Gorbachev	President of Russia
	Eduard Shevardnadze	Russian Prime Minister
	Javier Perez de Cuellar	U.N. Secretary-General

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